

Standards of Training in Measurement and Evaluation: A Reaction to Loesch's Proposed Guidelines

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Abstract:

Reactions to Loesch's proposed standards for professional preparation in measurement are given in terms of general licensure/accreditation/credentialing issues, as well as specific statements concerning each proposed standard.

Article:

Loesch (1983) is one of those rare articles that is published and receives instantaneous professional acclaim and attention. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the author, it is clear that he has addressed a critical issue. It is timely in that credentialing truly is, as Loesch states, currently "the major thrust" in the counseling profession. Professional certification and licensure are realities, and preparation in measurement is evaluated when counselors seek licensure and accreditation.

Does it then necessarily follow that specific preparation guidelines are needed *now*? Do we have enough data available to make this decision? Is it possible to endanger current credentialing/accreditation/licensure efforts by, "overstandardizing" too early in the game?

THE IMPACT OF AN IMPERATIVE

The designation of an imperative implies a need for immediate action. It is tantamount to saying that we must have standards *now*. Loesch (1983) argued that training in measurement and evaluation is not standardized, in spite of "theoretical" statements in the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) (1979) "Entry Level (Master's and Specialist) Standards for the Preparation of Counselors and Other Student Personnel Services Specialists." He did not, however, indicate the basis on which he reached this conclusion.

Although Loesch probably was correct in stating that "there is . . . considerable diversity" (p. 161) in our preparation programs, he failed to take this beyond the level of an assumption. Has there been a review of curricula or even a review of existing and widely used textbooks that would lend credence to this assumption? Before we risk infringement on "academic freedom" by imposing specific necessary course content, it would be helpful to review the current state of the art. At best, we might discover some potential areas of standardization not yet addressed. The need for and potential impact of standardization could then be more clearly addressed. As measurement professionals, it can be argued that we should not adopt standards in the absence of such baseline information. Loesch built a strong case for the need to standardize the existing standards: however, with more information, his case can be made even stronger.

It is important also to look ahead and assess the impact of the AMECD standards on current credentialing and licensure efforts. For example, will the AMECD preparation standards necessitate a revision of the newly developed National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) examination to ensure that all areas in the new standards are addressed? Will the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) readily adopt and consider the AMECD standards in evaluating counselor education programs for accreditation? Or will the CACREP find its efforts to gain national recognition by the Commission on Professional Affairs (COPA), in particular, less effective based on the need to react to internal policy and standard revisions?

A conclusion that may be drawn is that we need to work toward developing standards with input from two sides—counselor educators and measurement professionals as well as credentialing/accrediting bodies. The important part of this statement relates to the need for standards, with the mechanics of development, adoption, and implementation relevant but secondary concerns. Therefore, the present imperative is to react to Loesch's proposed standards with the ultimate goal of developing an AMECD approved statement concerning professional preparation in assessment.

SOME COMMENTS ON LOESCH'S PROPOSED STANDARDS

Loesch's proposal provides specific standards in four key areas. Each area makes an important contribution to professional preparation in each of the core areas of the ACES (1979) standards. Moreover, the format serves to draw attention to certain preparation issues that are vital, yet largely ignored in the current ACES (1979) standards. For example, Loesch quoted the standards as saying that "laboratory experiences . *might* include .. , testing ..." [author's italics] (p. 162). The proposed standards eliminate the vagueness in the current standards and in so doing serve to emphasize measurement preparation needs within the core preparation areas.

In terms of educational context, Loesch's Standard I, while certainly important, again raises the issue of the need for baseline information. To what extent are measurement courses currently being taught as a part of other courses? He presented compelling arguments for the need to have this course taught within the counselor education program by competent faculty and with adequate resources available for hands-on experiences. Standard IV could be improved by restating it; adequate *currently available and up-to-date* measurement and evaluation resources are needed. The inclusion of computer-assisted devices makes this a highly desirable standard that few programs now meet.

Standard III is less justified. Based on the statistical background required for full understanding of measurement concepts, to have students enroll in the basic measurement course in their first academic term may be premature. In fact, this may conflict with Standard V, in which Loesch stated that a basic statistics course is pre-requisite knowledge for the measurement course. He is quite correct in stating that basic measurement courses often become basic statistics courses, if the latter are not taken prior to enrollment in the course. If Standard V were rewritten to reflect the need for a graduate-level basic statistics course, this would be less likely to occur. Moreover, some knowledge of counseling theory and techniques, usually taught during the first and second quarters, is an essential prerequisite for pro-posed Standard XI. This standard addresses the need for covering the counseling uses of assessment results. It would be difficult to teach students how to counsel concerning assessment results if they had little or no knowledge of how to counsel at all. In regard to preparatory experiences, a basic statistics course is only one of the necessary prerequisites. An introductory counseling course in the core ACES (1979) standards area of "the helping relationship" is essential. In terms of logical sequencing, Standard 11 needs to occur after Standard V, if it is needed at all. Certainly, the measurement course should be taught early in the sequence, but not during the first term of enrollment.

The curricular content Loesch specified for inclusion in the basic measurement course is, for the most part, logical, necessary, and probably commonly taught. It might be useful to emphasize that both test and nontest assessment techniques should be included in the basic course. This is implied in Loesch's proposed standards; however, it is not clearly stated. Standard IX, for example, could be re-stated as "assessment instruments *and* techniques" rather than "assessment instruments or techniques" (p. 164). The importance of knowledge about scoring tests should be added to this standard, along with the stated aspects of selection, administration, and interpretation.

It is interesting to note that Standard XII allows for great latitude in advanced appraisal coursework. After pointed statements of the need for having the basic appraisal course taught in the counselor education department, Loesch's vagueness in this particular standard is not well justified. In fact, it seems incongruous with the previous, well-stated arguments of the need for making such courses optimally relevant to the needs of counselor education students.

An additional standard should be added to the several Loesch proposed in the area of curricular content to make this area more responsive to the existing ACES (1979) standards. The inclusion of measurement issues involved in assessment with special populations is essential for the beginning measurement course. This is especially, true since ethnic, cultural, and sex factors are considered to be part of the common core for counselor preparation (Loesch, 1983). The inclusion of this additional standard would allow a great deal of individual freedom for instructors, who could include content related to a variety of special populations (e.g., older persons, disabled adults, learning disabled children, minority individuals, etc.). The important point is that students should have the opportunity for exposure to special methods, techniques, and issues involved in assessing special and subpopulations.

Loesch made several valid observations in regard to the current lack of supervised clinical experiences in assessment and built a strong case for incorporating such experiences into practica and internships. Again, Standard XIII should include experience in scoring tests; however, this is both an assumed activity and a minor point in relation to the extreme importance of the standards relating to supervised experiences. These hold significant potential for integrating assessment activities into the mainstream of counseling functions, a situation that, as Loesch so adroitly pointed out, does not now exist.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It has been said that every journey begins with a single step, and the initial step toward developing standards in any area is no exception. The development and implementation of adequate, relevant, appropriate standards for preparation in measurement and evaluation necessitates the involvement of a variety of publics, including measurement professionals and practitioners, counselor educators, and licensure/credentialing/accrediting bodies.

Loesch presented the AMECD membership and the counseling profession with a challenge we cannot ignore: the development and implementation of standards of preparation in a core area of counselor training. Perhaps more than any other area, measurement is avoided, feared, and consequently given less attention by counselor educators and trainees. What is now offered is a means to counter the existing situation. In his concluding remarks, Loesch indicated that the intent of his proposed standards was to "stimulate the development of more formal, comprehensive, and specific standards" (p. 165). Obviously, this intent has been well met. At this point, what is needed is a note of appreciation to Loesch for a valuable, timely stimulus to the growth of our profession.

REFERENCES

- Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, (1979). *Standards for preparation in counselor education*. Falls Church, VA: American Personnel and Guidance Association.
- Loesch, L. (1983). Professional preparation guidelines: An AMEG imperative, *Measurement and Evaluation in Guidance*, 16, 161-165.